Shared Strategy for Puget Sound
April 2006 Three Year Work Program Review Comments
Hood Canal Chinook

Introduction

In April, 2006, watersheds submitted three-year work programs that would enable them to get on a recovery trajectory in the first three years of implementation. The work programs were reviewed by the Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team (TRT) and the Shared Strategy Interdisciplinary Policy Team. The technical and policy feedback is provided below.

This feedback is intended to assist your watershed as you refine your three year work programs and continue with development and implementation of your recovery plans. The feedback will also be used by the TRT and Shared Strategy Work Group to inform the development of the regional work plan. A summary of the Puget Sound watersheds' work programs was developed by Shared Strategy staff to stimulate discussion on recovery objectives to determine what the best investments are for salmon recovery over the next three years.

The following objectives were provided as guidance to watersheds in the development of their work programs. The Shared Strategy Work Group and TRT developed the objectives pursuant to consultation with watershed implementation leads and the Recovery Council.

- Improve the level and certainty of protection for habitat
- Protect the twenty two existing Chinook populations by beginning to address the most immediate and potentially greatest threats that could cause populations to decline in this timeframe
- Preserve options for increasing ESU diversity
- Restore ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options for habitat restoration, and by addressing the most immediate and potentially greatest threats in
    - estuaries
    - mainstem
    - upper watershed
    - freshwater tributaries and nearshore
    - water quality and quantity
- Advance the integrated management of harvest, hatchery and habitat to address the most immediate and potentially greatest threats
- Continue to expand and deepen individual and community support for key priorities
- Develop and implement adaptive management and monitoring program
    - monitoring
    - accountability system for evaluation and decision making
- Build capacity in each watershed to implement the full breadth of prioritized programs and projects needed to get on a recovery trajectory in the first there years
- Support multi-species

I. Puget Sound Technical Recovery Team Review

The TRT reviewed fourteen individual watershed salmon recovery three-year work plans in May 2006. Three questions were addressed. The questions and TRT's review comments are below.

1. *Is the watershed work plan consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for their watershed? (The "plan" includes hypotheses and strategies in the larger plan, including watershed plan, TRT May 2005 review comments, and NOAA Supplement comments).*

   Mostly. The work plan includes explicit programs to deal with H-Integration and monitoring, both of which are important.

   There is little information provided that would enable the reviewers to determine why specific projects were chosen in the freshwater and nearshore parts of Hood Canal and certain tributaries.

   Not enough information is provided to enable reviewers to understand how prioritization of projects within and among sub-basins, and freshwater vs. nearshore, would proceed if the full funding is not attained for the projects on the project list.

2. *Is the sequencing and timing of their work plan appropriate for the first three years of implementation?*

   Mostly. Habitat projects anticipating hatchery impacts or hatchery actions designed to mitigate negative effects of the hatchery fish in mid-Hood Canal and the Skokomish need to be integrated.

3. *Is the watershed work plan consistent with the hypotheses and strategy for their watershed? (The "plan" includes hypotheses and strategies in the larger plan, including watershed plan, TRT May 2005 review comments, and NOAA Supplement comments).*

   The lack of certainty in the effects of the Skokomish watershed population plan is a problem. Preserving options for that watershed and the effects of its restoration on nearshore need to be included in the 3-year work plan for mid-Hood Canal.

   The hypothesized interaction between hatchery and wild fish in the Hood Canal region is not spelled out. As habitat recovery and hatchery improvement actions are put in place, what is the expected effect on hatchery and wild fish interactions? Where are hatchery origin and wild fish likely to co-occur, in what numbers, and for how long? What will be the likely outcomes of those interactions? How will they monitor these and make needed adjustments in hatchery or habitat strategies over time?

How are protection measures (i.e., 'transactions') going to be implemented?

The work program lacks a clear explanation of how harvest strategies interact with hatchery and habitat strategies; nor does it address how those may be adjusted over time as needed. For example,

- fishing rates on hatchery stocks and their effects on wild fish recovery
- how harvest rate targets affect release numbers for hatchery fish, and how those affect the anticipated benefits of habitat projects

The work program narrative would be strengthened by specifying the relationship between Chinook projects/programs and summer chum projects/programs.

The balance of expenses for more studies/assessments (e.g., more EDT, AHA, etc.) vs. restoration and protection/acquisition projects for both nearshore and freshwater areas should be carefully reviewed, and could vary in accordance with different levels of investment and effort.

It is important that watershed recovery planners refer to the May 2005 Technical Gap Analysis to ensure that uncertainties are addressed in the adaptive management plan and work program refinements. The three year work program for Mid-Hood Canal Chinook will be strengthened by specifying the relationship between Skokomish Chinook projects/programs and those proposed for the Mid-Hood Canal Chinook population once the Skokomish Chinook recovery plan is completed.

II. Policy Review Comments

The Shared Strategy Interdisciplinary Policy Team evaluated each of the fourteen watershed work programs. The following questions guided the evaluation of the work programs.

1. Is the work program consistent with the policy feedback and recommendations from the 2004 documents "Watershed Policy Feedback Summaries"; Recovery Plan December 2005, Volume I, Watershed Profiles results sections; and NOAA's federal supplement published in the Federal Register on Dec. 16, 2005?
2. Is the work program tied to the objectives identified at a pace sufficient to achieve the watershed's ten –year goals?
3. Are there significant elements missing and how might these be addressed?

The interdisciplinary policy review team discussed the Hood Canal Chinook work programs in conjunction with the TRT. Specific comments are provided below, followed by a short discussion of elements common to all watershed work programs.

Comments and special issues

The work programs would be strengthened by prioritizing among projects in the tributaries and nearshore.

It is understood that work is progressing on the development of a recovery plan for the Skokomish Chinook population. A Skokomish Chinook three-year work program narrative and project list was provided for review. A clear strategy is needed to help address the lack of a recovery plan for the independent Skokomish Chinook population.

The work programs would benefit from an explicit discussion about flows and protection. In their current iteration, it appears that water quantity/flows are not a factor for recovery. This is contrary to the discussion of limiting factors for Mid-Hood Canal Chinook provided in volume I of the draft Chinook Recovery plan, and it may be that instream flows needed for fish are/will be addressed in the Watershed Plan developed under the 2514 process.

The proposed Mid-Hood Canal Chinook Biological Monitoring Project is well presented and appropriately noted as a high priority action.

Elements in common with other watershed work programs

All Puget Sound watersheds' work program refinements and recovery plan implementation activities will benefit from additional efforts to achieve H-Integration and the development of an adaptive management plan. Protecting and restoring ecosystem processes for Chinook and other species by preserving options and addressing threats is a critical component of recovery planning both at the local and regional scale. Strengthening the capacity to implement needed actions and to expand and deepen support for recovery program objectives is also critical to ESU recovery. Recommendations on how to achieve these objectives are contained in a Shared Strategy document entitled "Watershed Work Plans Related to Key Puget Sound Recovery Objectives" and are currently under discussion.